

THE LABOUR ORGANISER

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Topics of the Month

OUR reference last month to the possibility of an early General Election has created not a little interest in many quarters.

Some of our friends, however, have spoken of our "prophecy" of a May election, and the "Daily Herald" construed our remarks as the expression of our opinion that an early General Election *would* take place. Prophecy, however, was the furthest thing from our thoughts. Prophets of a General Election have nearly always been wrong. What we have done is merely to point out that the political situation in the early summer is likely to be such as to give the Prime Minister an excellent opportunity for making an appeal to the country—and that the advantages of his position are likely steadily to diminish after that.

This is not a prophecy. Indeed, who knows what is in the Prime Minister's mind? Micawber-like and secretive, Mr. MacDonald, even if he has any idea of this plan, is not likely to divulge it too soon. He will remember that the leakage of the date of the General Election during Mr. Baldwin's régime in the early part of 1929 gave Labour an excellent opportunity to prepare. What is more, he will have difficulties in his own camp, for whatever the outcome of a General Election, for a large number of his followers in the House of Commons the event means the termination of their political careers. These people may kick. But after all what military strategist is there but would take cognisance of any changes in the situation during a campaign which advantaged either him or the enemy? What would be said of failure to anticipate that the enemy might attack? It is this only that we had in mind. Events may shape as they will, but at least

we ought to remember that if the Government's stock goes up at any time it will present a strong temptation to go to the country.

Last month Labour Parties throughout the country received the preliminary announcement of the great "Victory for Socialism Campaign," an outline of which we gave in our last issue. This month the National Executive meet to consider the responses and perhaps to settle details as to when the campaign will commence. One could wish the whole Movement was agape and thirsting for the result of these deliberations. But because it is not quite ready there must be no slackening of the missionary zeal of those who realise that a holy crusade for Socialism is overdue, and that the conversion of the masses can alone lead us in safety to the New Social Order. This is a time when every old and tried Socialist is needed back in the Movement; when every new recruit and every zealous League of Youth member will be required to put out all he or she knows. The campaign to rouse the Movement first is every bit as vital as the campaign itself. Inspiration is the very soul of success in this matter, and amid all the dull and hum-drum work which the upkeep of a great Party involves, and in which so many of us are immersed, time must be found for the renewal of our faith and the revival of our enthusiasm. We most earnestly urge our readers to seek to spread enthusiasm for the coming campaign and to engender amongst Local Parties a yearning desire to see the great work accomplished.

How curious that immediately after we had written last month pointing out how the enemy had sought to raise a scare based on the speeches of certain Labour people, the daily Press and Tory speakers are to be found in full cry following a speech by

Sir Stafford Cripps. It is the old story once again. Toryism won't stand up to defend its reactionary policy or to meet with reason the constructive proposals of Socialists. On either ground they would register defeat. And so to scare old ladies, irritate elderly gentlemen, and perhaps incidentally set the cat among the pigeons in the Labour Party itself. A pretty game; but why should we play it? Labour has been cheated so often by being forced on to the defensive that the lesson ought to be well learnt by now. Labour speakers waste their time in following up any matter like this just because the Capitalist Press has found a hare to chase. In this particular connection, even if the construction put on Sir Stafford Cripps' speech were actually right, what is that compared with the open insurrection and rebellion against the forces of the Crown advocated at one time by the leading lights of Toryism? The whole point can be so easily turned to the enemy's disadvantage that we wonder why explanations and disavowals should take the place of direct challenge to the

enemy's own record—yes, and intentions in the future. We have something yet to learn in tactics.

We are not particularly satisfied at the moment with the preparations for the County Council Elections. County Federations have been for a long time busying themselves with this matter—in some areas with a certain measure of success, but in others with somewhat poor results. What are the Divisional Labour Parties and Local Labour Parties doing in this matter in many places? The whole trend of legislation is to strengthen the County Councils, and at present they are the securest home of reaction in the whole gamut of government. Really we must be up and doing. If we are really and truly "back to 1929" County Council seats should be falling like ninepins in March. But if the candidates are not forthcoming what then? We trust our readers will hammer at this matter in their Parties, and do their very utmost to see that Labour puts up a fine fighting front in these elections. And the time is drawing near.

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The Blind Voters Act 1933

Our readers are reminded that the Blind Voters Act (which we reproduced in our issue for April, 1933, when the Bill was before the House) became operative on the 1st January, and since that date blind persons have been enabled at any election to vote either with the assistance of a companion, or as heretofore.

The Act made certain alterations in the Ballot Act, and consequential alterations became necessary in the Statutory Rules and Orders which govern the Elections for the Metropolitan Borough and Urban, Rural and Parish Councils.

Our readers concerned with the latter class of elections are therefore reminded that amending Statutory Rules and Orders have been issued embodying such amendments as have been found necessary to the principal rules issued in 1931. These Rules and Orders are No. 1126 as affecting Urban Rural and Parish Councils, and No. 1127 as affecting Metropolitan Borough Elections. They are priced at twopence and one penny respectively.

Explanatory Home Office circulars have been issued to the appropriate local authorities drawing their attention to the changes made by the above Act, and covering these circulars is an explanatory official note which, as it explains the new procedure in full, is reprinted below. The memorandum here quoted may be obtained at the price of one penny from H.M. Stationery Office.

HOME OFFICE NOTE ON THE BLIND VOTERS ACT, 1933.

Under the existing law applicable to Parliamentary elections and elections of Councillors in Counties, Boroughs, Urban and Rural Districts and Parishes, any voter (whether registered in accordance with the Blind Persons Act, 1920, or not) who is incapacitated by blindness from marking a ballot paper in the ordinary way, can vote with the assistance of the presiding officer at the polling station, who is required in such a case to cause the voter's ballot paper to be marked in accordance with the voter's directions and placed in the ballot box. This has to be done in the presence of the candidates' agents, who like the presiding officer and other officials at the polling

station are obliged, under penalty, to maintain the secrecy of voting.

Provision has been made in the Blind Voters Act, 1933 for affording alternative facilities to any voter who is unable through blindness to vote without assistance; and accordingly on and after the 1st January, 1934, a blind elector on going to the poll at any of the above-mentioned elections will if entitled to vote be able to do so *either* with the assistance of the presiding officer as described above, or if he is accompanied to the polling station by another person duly qualified for the purpose, with the assistance of that person acting as companion.

Blind electors and persons whom they may ask to act as companions need not undertake any formalities before going to the polling station; but in order to avoid misunderstanding they will be well advised to note the following points:—

1. The person who is to act as companion must *either*—

- (a) be entitled to vote at the election — i.e., at a Parliamentary general election, entitled to vote in the same constituency as the blind voter; or at an election of Councillors, entitled to vote in the same county electoral division, the same ward of a Borough or Urban District, or the same Parish or ward of a parish, according to circumstances; or
- (b) be the father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, son or daughter of the blind voter and have attained the age of twenty-one years.

No person who does not possess one or other of the foregoing qualifications will be eligible to act as companion.

2. A person will *not* be eligible to act as companion for *more than two* blind voters at the same election.

3. Any person who undertakes to act as companion will thereupon be under obligation to maintain *secrecy* as to how the voter intends to vote or has voted; and failure to do so will be punishable on conviction by imprisonment.

A blind elector who wishes to vote with the assistance of a companion

should go to the polling station with a suitable person, and should apply to the presiding officer to be allowed to vote with that person's assistance. Subject to the ordinary enquiries preceding the issue of a ballot paper and to the completion, to the presiding officer's satisfaction, of the simple preliminaries described below, the application will be granted and the blind voter upon receiving a ballot paper will be allowed to have the companion's assistance in proceeding to a voting compartment, marking the paper and placing it in the ballot box. *The preliminaries will comprise (a) the making of an oral declaration by the voter that he or she is so incapacitated by blindness as to be unable to vote without assistance, and (b) the making by the companion of a written declaration (in a form which will be supplied by the presiding officer) to the effect that he or she is properly qualified and has not previously assisted more than one blind voter at the election.*

In making the above declarations, a blind voter or a companion, as the case may be, who knowingly and wilfully makes a statement false in any material particular will be guilty of a misdemeanour under the Perjury Act, 1911, and liable on conviction to be imprisoned and fined.

A blind elector who prefers to have the help of the presiding officer and not of a companion should, as in the past, go to the polling station and ask for the presiding officer's assistance.

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(Signed) W. E. Body, Sec.

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SAM HAGUE, Proprietor

POINTED PARS.

The National Conference of Labour Women is this year to be held at Cheltenham in the week commencing Monday, June 18th. Invitations to the Conference are to be issued this month.

Mr. J. P. Connolly, Agent at Northwich, has been appointed to the vacancy at Whitechapel vice Mr. G. Fineran, who, for a short while, acted in this capacity.

The King's Norton Divisional Labour Party co-operated with the local Co-operative Society during the latter's Shopping Week in December. King's Norton D.L.P. has a "Number" in both the local Co-operative Society and the Birmingham Society, and, we believe, profitted considerably by purchases being made during the special week under the Party's number.

We are interested to note that the business reply post card, introduced last year by the Postmaster General, and now so widely used by commercial concerns, has been taken up by the Labour Movement. The T.U.C. has issued a reply card for use by a person desiring to join a Trades Union, and the cards are issued in connection with the desired co-operation by Branches of the League of Youth in the recruitment of young persons to the Trades Union Movement. The cards are supplied free of charge by the T.U.C. and ought to be widely used by the political movement.

In connection with the preparation of the Register of Electors for the current year the Home Office has under date 2 January, again instructed Registration Officers, as for the last five years, that a house-to-house enquiry and distribution of the appropriate forms A and D should take place.

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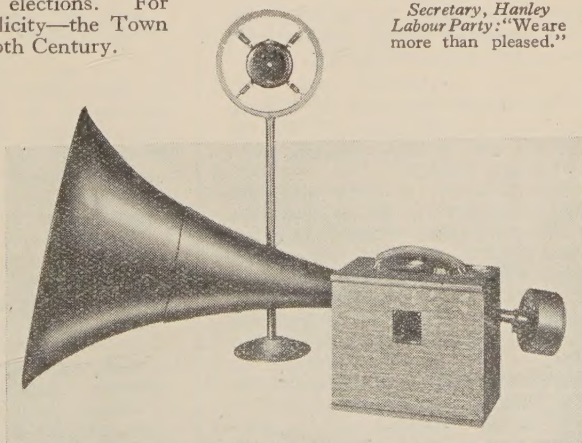
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Latest Literature : Secretaries Please Note

"The Colonial Empire." Price twopence. The Labour Party.

This is a reprint of the Policy Report presented and adopted at the Hastings Conference. It is, however, now printed on better paper with a most attractive cover. Dealing with a somewhat neglected aspect of Labour's policy this pamphlet should appeal to a wide section of the public.

"Immediate Steps Towards the New Order." Price one penny. By the Rt. Hon. Arthur Greenwood, M.P. The Labour Party.

This is a simply written exposition of Labour's attitude to the present order, and the plan which Labour has in mind for evolving a better system. In no sense is the pamphlet a programme for it is general in its advocacy. Attractively clothed and written by a popular leader the pamphlet should sell well.

"The Futility of the National Government." Price one penny. By the Rt. Hon. George Lansbury, M.P. The Labour Party.

Uniform with, but distinctively coloured from the above, is this pamphlet by the Leader of the Party. It is the exception among Labour pamphlets in that it is a frontal attack as well as an exposition. A pamphlet by the Leader on such ground should undoubtedly mean fast and good selling.

"The Ultimate Aims of the Labour Party." Price one penny. By the Rt. Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, M.P. The Labour Party.

This again is uniform with, but distinguishable in get-up from the above pamphlets. Penny pamphlets have been long called for. Here, then, are three of them by men in the public eye. The Publicity Department has certainly catered well for the Movement in their production. Sir Stafford Cripps is characteristically aggressive and the pamphlet is well written.

"Are You a Worker?—Where the Middle Class Stands." Price one penny. By the Rt. Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, M.P. The Labour Party.

Another type of pamphlet but strikingly got up and at the popular price. This pamphlet puts the case which Labour desires to be put to the non-manual worker, and it is a welcome and handy addition to our armoury in this respect.

"The Government Evades Its National Responsibility." Price twopence. Trades Union Congress.

In this pamphlet the main provisions of the Unemployment Bill are analysed and commented on. It is a heavy indictment of the Government's recent legislation.

"Starvation in the Midst of Plenty" (a new plan for the State feeding of young children). Price threepence. By Barbara Drake. Fabian Society, 11, Dartmouth Street, London, S.W.1.

A timely pamphlet in view of the controversy in which Major Elliot has so stupidly involved himself. Barbara Drake makes an all-embracing proposal which perhaps not all Labour supporters would endorse—particularly those sober-minded fossils who become so absorbed in public administration as to loosen their contact with the life and spirit of our Movement. But her proposal for supplying milk to all children notwithstanding the cost has our hearty support. We are sick to death of talk of the "necessitous."

"Mass Resistance to War." Price twopence. By Sir Charles Trevelyan. The Socialist League, 3, Victoria Street, London, S.W.1.

This pamphlet is, in effect, a contribution to a coming controversy inside the Movement arising out of the somewhat contradictory declarations of Annual Conference in relation to resistance of all war and loyalty to the League of Nations. As a Pacifist perhaps the editor had better not risk a charge of impartiality by commenting on the writer's views. But we hope the pamphlet will be read and seriously studied by all who desire our Movement to become in reality the greatest bulwark for peace.

"The Roosevelt Experiment."

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Price twopence. By Harold J. Laski.
The Socialist League.

An interesting pamphlet which, however, assumes that the reader has very closely followed the various steps in Roosevelt's Recovery Plan. Laski says, "Is not the lesson for us the clear one that only a combination of audacity and courage will carry us through our own hour of trial?" He makes the further point that Labour must not neglect to profit from the lesson that Roosevelt found it necessary to ask Congress to give him wide executive powers.

"The Choice for Britain." Price twopence. By the Rt. Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, M.P. The Socialist League.

Sir Stafford's prolific pen has produced yet another pamphlet which is a scholarly comment on the perplexities of the present situation, and the complex difficulties they will present to Socialists in particular. The field covered is both domestic and international.

"GET READY FOR 1934 ELECTIONS."

Durham Federation Acts.

The Durham County Federation of Divisional Labour Parties have rendered yet another powerful service to the great movement in the county which it covers, by the re-publication under the above title of a ready reference to Local Elections for Candidates, Agents and Secretaries. But the latter description, however, does not quite cover the whole aims of this little publication, for it includes organisation notes, a summary of the qualifications and disqualifications of candidates, and the election law relating to the whole series of local elections. The booklet contains also a speakers' list for the county and instructions to Labour workers.

We heartily congratulate Mr. J. W. Foster, the Secretary of the Federation, on the production and get-up of this invaluable publication. Address: "Rosendale," Neville's Cross, Co. Durham.

OUR YOUTH PAGE

By W.
ARTHUR
PEACOCK

This month the League of Youth looks forward eagerly to its annual conference which is to be held at Birmingham on January 20/21st. This is the second time that conference has met in that Midland city and that progress has been made in the interval is beyond question. The campaign lately inaugurated is producing good results already, and Maurice Webb is more than happy with the large number of branches that have been formed.

Doubtless delegates from many of these will be participating in the Birmingham discussions and it will be interesting to hear the various arguments that take place. It is with domestic problems of the League that the conference chiefly concerns itself. Problems of organisation and education. Questions of age limit, relationships with local parties, publication of literature, rural campaigning, establishment of hostels, these are the subjects covered by the resolutions that are on the agenda.

Each of these is important. The question of the place of the League in the organisation of the Party is one that may well be mentioned here. It is good to know that in most instances there is splendid co-operation between our League branch and the constituency organisations. Here and there difficulties arise and all too often it is because of ignorance of the constitutional position. Because of this it is good to know that a re-issue of the Party handbook on League of Youth organisation is being prepared. This is much needed and its publication ought to help to solve many of these problems. Confusion seems to obtain in regard to such matters as the League subscription, whether the delegates to the Party committee have voting powers, whether League of Youth can have funds of their own separate from the Party, whether they can organise social functions on their own.

Of course, many of these difficulties that arise are matters for local

settlement and ought to be easily solved. The other day a young enthusiast came to me distressed because an official of her local Party had intimated that the League could not hold a dance under its own auspices. The gentleman went even further. He declared that the League must on no account do it. His attitude was so aggressive that the local young people had declared they would have as little to do with the Party as was possible.

All this sort of thing is quite wrong. There is every reason for Parties and Leagues endeavouring to arrange programmes of social activities so that there are no clashes but there is no rule that says a League of Youth cannot hold a dance, a meeting, a lecture or any kind of function without permission.

There ought not to be quarrels on these topics. The position of League subscriptions is clearly defined and so, too, is the position of the League in regard to the Party. The spirit in which officials of each body meet each other has much to do with it. Young people can easily be upset, they can soon get the notion that the local adults are trying to "run" them. On the other hand the local Party can often get false ideas about its young people and try to act the part of the kind uncle too much.

Doubtless, as the organisation of the League progresses these problems will become fewer. Meanwhile, it is everybody's job to see that they are not responsible for hindering the progress of the movement. The great job of the moment for everybody is to increase the strength of the League so that the influence of the Party among young people may become the greater. The job of the Birmingham conference is to discuss ways and means by which this is possible. And the task of every Labour Party official is to lend a hand in the great campaign of "Labour's Call to Youth."

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HOW TO USE THE NUMBERED MARKING-OFF SHEET.

On the following page we reproduce
a typical numbered marking-off sheet.

We find that many election workers
are still unfamiliar with this time and
labour-saving device, which comes
into use in committee rooms on poll-
ing day — an occasion when to save
time and labour is to save votes. We
have found other workers who decry
numbered sheets largely because they
do not understand their use or real-
ise their simplicity.

In the first place it must be under-
stood that each committee room will
have a sheet or sheets for every por-

tion of the register controlled there-
from. The object of the marking-off
sheet is to supersede wall-boards or
the marked register—not to supersede
fetch-up cards or single canvass or
promise-cards used as such; and the
main purpose served is as a record
of votes polled.

For small registers one sheet may
sometimes be cut up and made to
serve for two or three registers or
even two or three committee rooms.

The first thing is to prepare the
sheet for use and two or three illus-
trations will suffice.

Assume a polling district numbered
1 to 375. All that needs doing is to
cut off or delete the whole sheet from
376.

If one assumes a polling district
commencing at 239 and ending at
692 one first of all deletes each
number up to 238 and proceed as
before to deal with 693 and on.

But suppose one's register begins at
1436 and ends at 1872? Proceed
along the columns to 400. Add figure
1 in front of this number and also at
the head of each succeeding column.
This converts the numbers into thou-
sands. One deletes everything up to
1435 and on from 1873, precisely
as before.

We hope we have made this clear.
A few simple experiments will soon
accustom the reader to make a sheet
for a register of any size or number
of electors.

Now that the sheet is prepared with
a number for every elector it should
be marked up for "fors" and if one
desires it also for "against" and
"doubtfuls." The customary red or
blue pencil marks are preferably made
before the number.

On polling day there will be no
time wasted turning over pages of the
register or scanning large and cum-
berous wall-boards. Pin the marking-
off sheet on a smooth board or wall,
or else paste same to a handy sized
strawboard for use on the table.

As voters poll the numbers should
be struck out completely, and the
numbered sheet thus used economises
both time and labour, and often
temper too. The unfamiliarity of
workers with this method has pre-
vented its very extensive use, but, as
will be seen, if the board is properly
prepared it greatly simplifies the work
of the committee room clerks.

MARKING-OFF SHEET

	50	100	150	200	250	300	350	400	450	500	550	600
1	51	01	51	01	51	01	51	01	51	01	51	01
2	52	02	52	02	52	02	52	02	52	02	52	02
3	53	03	53	03	53	03	53	03	53	03	53	03
4	54	04	54	04	54	04	54	04	54	04	54	04
5	55	05	55	05	55	05	55	05	55	05	55	05
6	56	06	56	06	56	06	56	06	56	06	56	06
7	57	07	57	07	57	07	57	07	57	07	57	07
8	58	08	58	08	58	08	58	08	58	08	58	08
9	59	09	59	09	59	09	59	09	59	09	59	09
10	60	110	160	210	260	310	360	410	460	510	560	610
11	61	11	61	11	61	11	61	11	61	11	61	11
12	62	12	62	12	62	12	62	12	62	12	62	12
13	63	13	63	13	63	13	63	13	63	13	63	13
14	64	14	64	14	64	14	64	14	64	14	64	14
15	65	15	65	15	65	15	65	15	65	15	65	15
16	66	16	66	16	66	16	66	16	66	16	66	16
17	67	17	67	17	67	17	67	17	67	17	67	17
18	68	18	68	18	68	18	68	18	68	18	68	18
19	69	19	69	19	69	19	69	19	69	19	69	19
20	70	120	170	220	270	320	370	420	470	520	570	620
21	71	21	71	21	71	21	71	21	71	21	71	21
22	72	22	72	22	72	22	72	22	72	22	72	22
23	73	23	73	23	73	23	73	23	73	23	73	23
24	74	24	74	24	74	24	74	24	74	24	74	24
25	75	25	75	25	75	25	75	25	75	25	75	25
26	76	26	76	26	76	26	76	26	76	26	76	26
27	77	27	77	27	77	27	77	27	77	27	77	27
28	78	28	78	28	78	28	78	28	78	28	78	28
29	79	29	79	29	79	29	79	29	79	29	79	29
30	80	130	180	230	280	330	380	430	480	530	580	630
31	81	31	81	31	81	31	81	31	81	31	81	31
32	82	32	82	32	82	32	82	32	82	32	82	32
33	83	33	83	33	83	33	83	33	83	33	83	33
34	84	34	84	34	84	34	84	34	84	34	84	34
35	85	35	85	35	85	35	85	35	85	35	85	35
36	86	36	86	36	86	36	86	36	86	36	86	36
37	87	37	87	37	87	37	87	37	87	37	87	37
38	88	38	88	38	88	38	88	38	88	38	88	38
39	89	39	89	39	89	39	89	39	89	39	89	39
40	90	140	190	240	290	340	390	440	490	540	590	640
41	91	41	91	41	91	41	91	41	91	41	91	41
42	92	42	92	42	92	42	92	42	92	42	92	42
43	93	43	93	43	93	43	93	43	93	43	93	43
44	94	44	94	44	94	44	94	44	94	44	94	44
45	95	45	95	45	95	45	95	45	95	45	95	45
46	96	46	96	46	96	46	96	46	96	46	96	46
47	97	47	97	47	97	47	97	47	97	47	97	47
48	98	48	98	48	98	48	98	48	98	48	98	48
49	99	49	99	49	99	49	99	49	99	49	99	49

Sound Advice to Annual Meetings

The season for annual meetings is with us. It is at this period of the year that a very large number of Local Labour Parties veritably stand at the cross roads. The past year may have been what it may, but upon what is done at the annual meeting depends whether or no the Local Party is to meet prosperity during the ensuing year, or muddle on with no plans or prospects and no drive or direction.

How many annual meetings will be held where the report of the past year will be received and the accounts will be passed but no budget will be prepared of this year's income and expenditure, and no sort of programme be put before the Party?

There is one thing to be said for the British Parliamentary system. Every session opens with a King's speech; a programme of legislation is put forward, and barren indeed is the session if the Statute Book at the prorogation of Parliament is not the richer for something attempted and something done.

Why not the equivalent of a King's speech at our annual meetings? The Executive ought to meet before the annual meeting so that they may present, at any rate, some rough idea of the activities which they suggest their Party should engage in during the year. If this happy plan was adopted more often we should see greater vigour and more enthusiasm, and perhaps also, more eagerness for responsible office.

We also venture to suggest to secretaries that the annual meeting is no routine affair to be summoned in hum-drum and slipshod manner. Party rules provide that affiliated organisations should have already been notified that the period of office of their delegates has expired, and organisations should have been invited to appoint fresh delegates. Unfortunately, this universal rule seems to be more observed in the breach than in the performance.

Twenty-eight days' notice should be given of the annual meeting, and even if dates are already fixed our strong advice to secretaries and executives would be that it is better to postpone the annual meeting for a

while and summon it adequately and efficiently than to start a year's work with a poor and moribund meeting.

Though an important function in every annual meeting is to receive a report and accounts for the past year, we are never enamoured of looking backward. Socialist instinct is to look forward, and the hint we have given above should be the key-note of the chairman's speech.

But it is on the choice of officers for the ensuing year that so much will depend, and here for once let every Party try to avoid sheer, stark tragedy.

We could write books concerning the tragic election to office of unsuitable people. We could give long lists of murderers of Local Parties, who have been appointed as secretaries at annual meetings, and who during the year, seem to have had no other object in view than the strangulation of all the life and soul their Party possessed. We are using hard words, but to our sorrow, we must protest that they are profoundly true.

Why do bifurcated carrots of the type one sometimes meets as secretary ever accept office, and what is more, what are the blockheads doing who elect such people? Let us give one or two instances. A D.L.P. secretary in a certain division has held office for years, and actually drawn a salary out of such affiliation fees as he collects. No Party meeting was held for twelve months; repeated letters remained unanswered. No H.O. correspondence was ever considered and the Party, to all intents and purposes was dead. Under pressure an annual meeting is called, yet this same fellow was re-elected to office and another year of similar hibernation has now gone by.

A second instance. A new Party was formed, Dormouse was the secretary. He received subscriptions but never called a single meeting — the Party died. Two years went by: the Party was reformed, Dormouse again was made secretary. Again the same thing and the second Party died. A third time the Party was revived, this time a new secretary and the Party met and prospered a little. But the new secretary left the town and

Dormouse, for a third time, took office. That Party has not met since, and the last we heard of Dormouse was that he was proposing to stand as an Independent municipal candidate.

Why bore our readers with any further instances? Out of our experiences we could give hundreds of ill selections. On the other hand every Party has its measure of gold as it has its dram of dross. We pray fervently that annual meetings this year will insist upon the gold.

Everybody knows what so often takes place in the election of officers. So far from the real purpose being to find the *most fitting* man or woman the matter resolves itself into finding anybody to take on the job. Everybody looks round the room. It's the old story of the war again—"everybody but me." At last some new face is descried and office and honour is offered and accepted with a sheepish grin. Well, we do not like this procedure. If the Party has a soul and the soul is stirred, and (as we have suggested above) the year's work looms ahead showing real activity and sound purpose, there is less likelihood of everybody declining office, and more likelihood of the right person shouldering the burden.

We have no faith at all in hide-bound standing orders or rules which compel the election or promotion of this or that officer to any office, or the denial of re-election to any person. A good officer is worth sticking to, be he chairman or vice-chairman, or anything else, unless, indeed, he or she becomes altogether too much of a permanency.

Next to the secretary, on the choice of chairman depends the prospects of the Party. Good chairmen are rare. A chairman's job is not merely to preside over meetings. He is the Party leader, and from him many people will take their impressions of the Party. A wise and careful choice, therefore, is indicated quite regardless of individual ambitions.

And the treasurer. The methods of operation and the functions of treasurer and financial secretary differ so widely in different Parties that the importance of these offices varies. But how absurd it is to put an entirely illiterate man in charge of accounts, and equally to appoint some flamboyant and irresponsible jackanapes to the job. Given a first-rate secretary,

a good chairman and a sound treasurer one has a trinity through which in very truth a Party might find salvation.

But annual meetings must be careful of other things. We have seen admirable officers harnessed to executives which were the last word in inertia. Please don't elect people to executives just because they live somewhere and consequently must "represent" that area. It is a fallacy to do this, for "representatives" obviously represent, and the man or woman who cannot make a member in his or her own area is hardly the type from which to make an executive member. Brains, zeal, energy—these are the things of which executives should be composed, and please do not forget that youth has a goodly share of all three.

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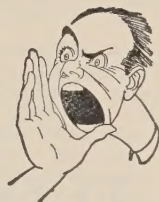
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Local Government Act, 1933—Vital Changes

DISQUALIFICATION BY CONTRACT NOW ABOLISHED.

We desire to draw our readers' attention to the Local Government Act, 1933, which received the Royal assent some time ago, and which comes into operation on the 1st June, this year.

This Act, nominally a consolidating Act to which in the ordinary course no particular attention would be paid, is, however, an Act to "consolidate with amendments" the enactments relating to Local Government authorities in England and Wales. It consists of no less than 308 clauses and eleven schedules.

It will surprise our readers to learn the wide effect of this Act, apart from its effect upon the powers of local authorities and the legislation relating thereto. Wholesale repeals have taken place in the Statutes on which the present law of elections for Local Government authorities rests, and innumerable minor changes have been brought about. The following may be cited as examples only:—

(1) In future, receipt of Poor Law Relief will be a disqualification for a Municipal Borough Council. Formerly this disqualification had only applied in the case of a *County Borough*. (2) Municipal vacancies occurring within six months of the expiry of office to which the vacancy relates may not now be filled (as was the case for District Councils and County Councils). (3) Objections to nominations in Municipal Elections are now abolished. (4) The qualifications for election, particularly to Municipal Councils, have been recast. Qualification based on the ownership of property is now limited to ownership of freehold or leasehold land. (5) Voting by show of hands at Parish Council Elections may now be abolished by the County Council. (6) In an election for more than one member good votes on any ballot paper "void for uncertainty" are now to be counted. (7) Disqualification by contract is abolished (see below).

As instancing where the Act does not go far enough, we may point out that while Borough and County Council Election procedure is settled the elections for Urban, Rural and District Council Elections will still continue to be governed by Statutory Rules and Orders, new codes for

which one presumes will be issued on the Act coming into force. The procedure of elections at present laid down for the Municipal and County Councils in the Municipal Corporations Act, 1882, the Local Government Act, 1888, the Local Government Act, 1899, the Local Government Act, 1894, and in other Acts, including the Ballot Act, is all repealed.

As might be expected of any measure of this character, introduced by a Tory Government, the Act stops short of being a satisfactory measure merely unifying the procedure at local Government Elections. In many parts of the Act the trail of the serpent is to be seen. The blessed words "consolidate with amendments" are used to bolster up reactionary tit-bits.

It will amaze our readers to discover that under the cloak just mentioned all the contract disqualifications relating to membership of authorities have been swept away. Disqualification by employment remains, and is even extended. But no matter how flagrant the case no disqualification is incurred because a man has a contract with the Council of which he is a member.

Under a procedure which the Minister found pretty difficult to defend against Labour attacks, members of a public authority who have contracts with the local authority on which they sit in future have merely to declare an interest in a contract before the Council and refrain from voting or speaking thereon.

The Act does not apply to the elections for Metropolitan Borough Councils or to Scotland.

Our readers will perceive from what has been stated that the Local Government Act, 1933, is a measure of prime importance to all concerned in the working of Local Government in England and Wales. The Act should be purchased, and is on sale at 4s. 6d. a copy from H.M. Stationers. We propose in our next few issues to completely cover those sections of the Act which relate to the law of elections. We will whet our readers' appetites this month by confining ourselves to giving the Sections of the Act relating to contracts.

Clause 76.

(1) If a member of a local authority has any pecuniary interest, direct or indirect, in any contract or proposed contract or other matter, and is present at a meeting of the local authority at which the contract or other matter is the subject of consideration, he shall at the meeting, as soon as practicable after the commencement thereof, disclose the fact, and shall not take part in the consideration or discussion of, or vote on any question with respect to, the contract or other matter:

Provided that this section shall not apply to an interest in a contract or other matter which a member may have as a ratepayer or inhabitant of the area, or as an ordinary consumer of gas, electricity or water, or to an interest in any other matter relating to the terms on which the right to participate in any service, including the supply of goods, is offered to the public.

(2) For the purposes of this section a person shall (subject as hereafter in this subsection provided) be treated as having indirectly a pecuniary interest in a contract or other matter, if—

(a) he or any nominee of his is a member of a company or other body with which the contract is made or is proposed to be made or which has a direct pecuniary interest in the other matter under consideration; or

(b) he is a partner, or is in the employment, of a person with whom the contract is made or is proposed to be made or who has a direct pecuniary interest in the other matter under consideration:

Provided that—

(i) this subsection shall not apply to membership of, or employment under, any public body;

(ii) a member of a company or other body shall not, by reason only of his membership, be treated as being so interested if he has no beneficial interest in any shares or stock of that company or other body.

(3) In the case of married persons living together the interest of one spouse shall, if known to the other, be deemed for the purposes of this section to be also an interest of that other spouse.

(4) A general notice given in writing to the clerk of the authority by

a member thereof to the effect that he or his spouse is a member or in the employment of a specified company or other body, or that he or his spouse is a partner or in the employment of a specified person, shall, unless and until the notice is withdrawn, be deemed to be a sufficient disclosure of his interest in any contract, proposed contract or other matter relating to that company or other body or to that person which may be the subject of consideration after the date of the notice.

(5) The clerk of the authority shall record in a book to be kept for the purpose particulars of any disclosure made under subsection (1) of this section, and of any notice given under subsection (4) thereof, and the book shall be open at all reasonable hours to the inspection of any member of the local authority.

(6) If any person fails to comply with the provisions of subsection (1) of this section, he shall for each offence be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds, unless he proves that he did not know that a contract, proposed contract, or other matter in which he had a pecuniary interest was the subject of consideration at the meeting.

(7) A prosecution for an offence under this section shall not be instituted except by or on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

(8) The county council, as respects a member of a parish council, and the Minister, as respects a member of any other local authority, may, subject to such conditions as the county council or the Minister, as the case may be, may think fit to impose, remove any disability imposed by this section in any case in which the number of members of the local authority so disabled at any one time would be so great a proportion of the whole as to impede the transaction of business, or in any other case in which it appears to the county council or the Minister, as the case may be, that it is in the interest of the inhabitants of the area that the disability should be removed.

(9) A local authority may by standing orders provide for the exclusion of a member of the authority from a meeting of the authority whilst any contract, proposed contract or other matter in which he has such an interest as aforesaid is under consideration.